

CLAIMS:

1. Ballast for operating a low-pressure mercury vapor discharge lamp (1) having two luminescent portions (11, 21) each radiating in a different color, said ballast comprising AC supply means (30) for supplying an AC current to the lamp (1), characterized in that the ballast further comprises DC supply means (40) for simultaneously supplying a DC current to the lamp (1), said DC supply means (40) having means (Z_{DC} , 41, 42, 43) for changing the intensity and/or direction of said DC current.
2. Ballast according to claim 1, wherein the means (30) for supplying the AC current comprise a half-bridge converter.
3. Ballast according to claim 2, wherein the DC supply means (40) comprise a switch (41, 42) connected in parallel with one of the capacitors (Cb1) of the half-bridge converter, such that when the switch (41, 42) is closed the capacitor (Cb1) is shunted.
4. Ballast according to claim 3, wherein said parallel connection is provided with an impedance (Z_{DC}).
5. Ballast according to claim 4, wherein said impedance (Z_{DC}) is a variable impedance.
6. Ballast according any of the preceding claims 3 - 5, wherein the switch is a bipolar switch (41), and the switch is connected in parallel with the second capacitor (Cb2) of the half-bridge over the second pole, such that when the switch (41) is closed onto the second pole the second capacitor (Cb2) is shunted.
7. Ballast according to claim 6, wherein the switch (41) has a third neutral position, wherein the capacitors (Cb1, Cb2) are not shunted.

8. Ballast according to claim 3 or 4, wherein the DC supply means (40) comprise a second switch (43) connected in parallel with the second capacitor (Cb2) of the half-bridge converter, such that when the second switch (43) is closed the second capacitor (Cb2) is shunted.

9. Ballast according to claim 8, wherein the two switches (42, 43) are electronically controlled switches, being capable of operating independently of the electronically controlled switches (31, 32) of the half-bridge converter.